

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor Bellamy, Asheville City Council Members

FROM: Gary W. Jackson, City Manager

SUBJECT: Transport and Processing of Nuclear Waste

DATE: June 8, 2007

Introduction:

In June, 2006, a report entitled *Asheville: At the Nuclear Crossroads* was disseminated by the Common Sense at the Nuclear Crossroads Campaign. There continues to be concern expressed within our community about the transport of nuclear waste on the federal interstate system. This memo is a basic update of city services relative to this particular issue.

Background:

The United States Department of Energy is in the process of selecting one or more nuclear fuel recycling centers. Two of the proposed sites are located in South Carolina. If one or both of these sites is selected by the federal government as a recycling center, the amount of radioactive waste transported on interstate highways through Western North Carolina could increase.

Common Sense at the Nuclear Crossroads has expressed concerns about the potential for terrorists to turn a load of nuclear waste into a "dirty bomb". Unfortunately, experience has demonstrated that acts of terrorism are difficult to predict and prevent. Therefore federal, state and local agencies throughout the United States have worked diligently to mitigate, plan for, respond to and recover from acts of terrorism. Our public safety personnel are trained to respond in an "all hazards" approach and to use the national incident management system which pulls together local, state and federal agencies during disasters.

Public Safety agencies throughout Western North Carolina and Asheville in particular are at the forefront of these activities. Asheville Fire and Rescue is host to North Carolina Hazardous Materials Regional Response Team 6 (RRT 6). RRT 6 is one of seven such specialized emergency response teams strategically located throughout the state.

Asheville's team is qualified to handle a wide range of hazardous materials incidents, including radiological and nuclear incidents. The team is staffed by 100 Asheville firefighters trained to the hazardous materials technician level.

Asheville's personnel have received extensive training in nuclear and radiological emergencies. Several Asheville firefighters have participated in an intense training course at the federally sponsored Nevada Test Site.

In the context of nuclear and radiological incidents, Asheville has a wide range of resources at its disposal. Recently, City Council accepted a \$192,000.00 grant from North Carolina Emergency Management. The specialized equipment purchased through this grant will further enhance our region's capability to respond to natural and man made disasters, including acts of terrorism.

The Department of Energy maintains stringent guidelines for transporting nuclear materials. Containers are mandated to be built to withstand the most severe accidents that can occur in the United States. In addition, Department of Energy radiological assistance teams provide expertise and equipment, including mobile laboratories, to every region of the country. Furthermore, according to a voluntary mutual assistance agreement, utilities respond to incidents in their area until emergency personnel from the shipper and shipping utility arrive.

The Department of Energy's built in safeguards coupled with the region's emergency response capabilities, provide the citizens of WNC a reasonable measure of assurance in the event a vehicle carrying nuclear material is involved in an accident or terrorist attack. We are as well prepared, or more prepared than other North Carolina communities for such unfortunate disasters.

Recommendation:

This memo is simply for informational purposes only. Decisions on this issue will ultimately be made at the federal level. City staff will continually assess our threats and adjust our services accordingly.